

Statement by Tracey Matters relating to IIO report into the fatal shooting of Gregory Matters by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police

The Matters family is saddened and extremely disappointed by the findings of the IIO investigation into the death of Greg Matters who was shot dead by the RCMP on September 10, 2012.

The IIO today released its findings after a seven and a half month investigation.

The family has serious questions about a number of discrepancies, omissions, and speculation in the IIO report while acknowledging that they have not yet been provided with any investigative material other than the brief IIO report itself.

Issues leading up to the shooting

- The decision to arrest Greg on his own property over a minor domestic dispute with his brother
- The refusal by police to allow a family member, a neighbour and Greg's psychiatrist to talk and meet with him to create a safe environment which would have resulted in Greg being able to be apprehended peacefully
- The serious assault on Greg's mother by armed police, on her own property, to prevent her from reaching Greg with the intent of speaking with him and defusing the situation
- The decision by police not to apprehend Greg in a peaceful manner when they had several opportunities to do so

Issues surrounding the shooting

- The decision by police to deploy an Emergency Response Team (ERT) including men armed with M-16 submachine guns and a helicopter to deal with the fallout from a relatively minor domestic dispute between two brothers

- The actions and decisions made by the four members of the ERT in the period leading up to the shooting
- Given that the ERT officers are specially trained to 'take dangerous and difficult people into custody in a safe manner' why did they fail so miserably in this case?
- The Matters family maintain that although Greg might have been difficult to deal with at times, he was not dangerous, and the police knew this as well
- Greg clearly did not have a firearm yet he was shot to death on his own property
- The RCMP knew that he was suffering from post traumatic stress disorder from discussions with his treating psychiatrist and his mother, yet they precipitated a situation that had a fatal outcome
- The family maintains that the ERT, which is supposedly the elite response group within the RCMP, should not have got its members into a situation where a decision was made that deadly force was left as their only option
- The ERT had three non-lethal options – a dog, CEW (taser) and a bean-bag shotgun – two of which were not deployed
- The report indicates they chose to deploy the taser (which was ineffective) and two lethal options – one officer close to Greg was armed with a pistol and a rifle, the other with a high powered assault rifle
- The officer with the non-lethal bean-bag shotgun claimed he did not have a clear line of fire
- The family questions why a professional team of elite officers would not have deployed in a more effective and safe manner, which would have allowed non-lethal options to be used

The Matters family appreciates that the IIO has a limited mandate, which is to establish criminal culpability, but it is still disappointed with many important aspects of the case, such as the assault on Lorraine Matters, the refusal to let Greg's psychiatrist, Dr

Passey, talk to him and preventing Greg's neighbour from escorting him to the police station, which contributed to this tragic outcome.

The assault on Greg's mother Lorraine, a woman in her 60s, raises serious questions. After getting permission from police to meet with Greg, she was stopped at the driveway to the cabin where he was located. A police officer, wearing bullet-proof outerwear and a face helmet, pointed what looked like a machine gun at her. He forced her hands up causing her pain and bruising. He then grabbed her jacket and ripped her shirt. She fell to the ground and was dragged by the officer along the road. As she tried to get up, the officer kned her in the chest and threatened to knee her again if she tried to move. She was then taken to the police station in handcuffs where she was strip searched and told she was being charged with assault. During her time in custody, she was not allowed to make any phone calls and she begged the police to call Dr Passey, Greg's treating psychiatrist. She was still in custody when she was informed that Greg had been shot dead. The assault charges were never pursued.

The British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) and the Matters family allege that Lorraine's treatment at the hands of the RCMP is inextricably linked to the shooting of her son. She was treated as an active threat by police, rather than as an ally in negotiating a peaceful outcome.

The BCCLA is now pursuing this assault through the Commission for Public Complaints against the RCMP.

A key player in this tragedy is Greg's psychiatrist Dr Greg Passey who had been treating him for 18 months. Police in Prince George contacted Dr Passey shortly before Greg was shot. He says he asked to speak to Greg and said he was willing to fly from Vancouver so that he 'could walk him out'. According to Dr Passey, the phone went 'dead' and he assumed he was no longer required. He was devastated to hear the next day on the news that Greg had been shot.

Dr Passey says that since Greg's death, there have been two similar cases involving veterans and the RCMP that have been resolved without incident because the RCMP allowed clinicians to speak with the veterans.

The Matters family is also upset that a friend and neighbour was prevented by police from being allowed to escort Greg to the police station at Prince George.

Just prior to the shooting, Greg spoke to the neighbour on the phone and asked her to pick him up. Police stopped her in her driveway and would not let her pick Greg up, or phone him.

The Matters family believes the police need to explain why they denied Lorraine Matters and the neighbour access to Greg. The family believes strongly that if Lorraine or Dr Passey had spoken to Greg, or the neighbour had been allowed to pick him up and drive him to the police station as he requested, this tragedy could have been averted.

According to the BCCLA, Greg was shot when 'the ERT decided to enter on the property and force the issue instead of first connecting Mr Matters with people who could have talked him out'.